

## The Symbiosis of Singing and Stage Performance in the Malaysian Music Industry

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**Abstract:** Malaysia is a developing country rich in its culture and traditions dating back for centuries. The evolution of music in Malaysia, unnoticed by many, plays distinctive notes inspiring and transforming the paradigm shift of its people. Malaysian music transcends from melismatic, organum and minimalism, to the current progressive intervals, modulations and eclectic variations of form, structure, rhythm, chords and melodies. Vast social and economic developments change the appreciation of music in its representation by the transportation of musical essences through the delicate sensory motors of the human mind and body via sight and sound. The overall composition of this journal is to provide a thorough overview of the integration and of vocal singing and performance through the spectacle of music. Results, data, musical notations, facts and figures pertaining to this study shall be derived through books, articles, internet (reliable sources with citations) and interviews from industrialists and professionals. Conservation efforts through innovations would evidently furnish new and innovative musical ideas blending in through the inevitable influx of American/European and global new-age music. Unlike some neighboring countries that prioritize national interests, Malaysia welcomes innovations and new musical ideas. Nonetheless, the essence of the Malaysian heritage should never be compromised. To date, the diminishing factor of traditional music is rather disheartening.

**Keywords:** Melismatic, Organum, Minimalism, Intervals, Modulations, Eclectic

### 1. Introduction

Singing is related to the art of human vocalism through a short musical composition with words. Visual is a communication media reflecting the spectacular factors of the song making a performance holistic.

First known and used in the 15th Century (1582), the word "vocare" meaning "to call" originates from a Latin word "vok" or "vox" and was adapted to Middle English word "vocal" meaning "voice". <https://www.etymonline.com> Malaysian musical performances evolved long before the emergence electronic media. Going back in time, plays such as the 'Mak Yong', 'MekMulung' and the 'WayangKulit' were some of the popular traditional performances collaborating music, acting and ritual. They are still being performed today in remote rural village areas. Over time, other forms of contemporary musical performances began to mushroom. Amongst which were the 'bangsawan', 'orchestra', 'pop', 'rock', 'rhythm and blues' and 'electronic music'.

The effects music has on human is rather fascinating. Man rekindles memories through two vital senses namely scent and music. Evergreen songs remarkably travel you back in time. The sense of scent may virtually transport you back to where the lingering moments you had experienced.

There are efforts being made to sustain and preserve music performances of Malaysian traditional music, culture, heritage and tradition. Measures are being implemented by the government through the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry.

On the music academic implementations in Malaysia, music theories were introduced as early as the seventies in pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities. Modern and traditional music are still being taught today. Arts schools or 'SekolahSeni' were set up for artistically inclined students.

Malaysia also welcomes various forms of foreign music such as the Classical, Baroque, Indian, British, American and mainstream genres from most part of the world. Many of Malaysia's hits were inspired by the cross-culture of music from many parts of the world.

Recording methods in Malaysia began transcended from the quarter inch, one inch, two-inch tapes to the highly sophisticated digital recording methods. Radio was the means of broadcast in late 40's and 50's. On 28th of December 1963, Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) was launched. It soon became the phenomenal visual entity that magnifies the spectacle of musical performances in Malaysia. To date, radio, television, videos and theatres give opportunities for recording companies to spread the wings and fly to greater heights. Over the

years, event organizers, promoters and entertainment agencies grew in numbers. The RIM or Recording Industry of Malaysia is targeting to about RM 500 million annual value for the Malaysian music industry by 2028. The current social media access continue to contribute millions to the Malaysian music and entertainment industry.

## 2. Related Works and Citations

Music is a vital element of nature we can't live without. I would interpret a song as "a rendition of a story performed in eclectic melody variations". Every song tells a story may it be sung or even instrumental. The mood of the music portrays cheerfulness, sadness or strength through sound. A 'sprechgesang' or recitative singing style, mostly performed in theatres similarly conveys a story.

Humans did not have the slightest idea that communication of thought and feelings were actually achievable (Otto Jespersen, 1922).

Intonations of the human voice alone depicts a story and a form of communication. The theme of life is perceived and applied through its relations with the context of lyric creation. (Logan et al., 2004; Parveen, 2017).

"The oldest, truest, most beautiful organ of music, the origin to which alone our music owes its being, is the human voice." (Richard Wagner & Rackham, 1977).

Malaysian music evolves through the symbiosis of audio and visual. Ratings for radio, musical variety shows on television and were soaring and anchoring music scene gaining revenues for local and international record companies.

The correlation between communication through sound and visual is evident. A journal by FrithHesselink, the Chair of the IUCN Commission for Education and Communication entitled 'Communicating nature conservations 10 frequently made mistake', cited that visual is a communication media.

FrithHesselink felt that more often than not nature conservationists do not clearly define their problem. When designing a new national park, the importance of the park were only conveyed through the communication tools of posters or leaflets. Frith thought this wasn't useful a method facts and was just mere propaganda.

Similar to visual, singing is a communication medium. The impact of solely visual without sound is debatable. Engagement to the audience in a performance of this sort is also be disputable.

Otto Jespersen in 'Language, Its Nature, Development and Origin' (1922), wrote about the vital role of sound to music in enhancing sensation and emotions to human being. Pleasure and sensation to human senses may be derived through the symbiosis of neuro-design of these two elements.

Yuna, a famous Malaysian singer mentioned the symbiosis of music and visual through the following statement:

"...people can just listen to the song and enjoy the beauty. It's a moving photograph in the end. I just wanted to do something different where the fans can enjoy the cool visuals with their listening experience" - Yuna <https://www.Intvglobal.com/id/article/how-malaysian-singer-yuna-became-rbs-brightest-new-star/>

A spectacular performance must come with majestic visual and audio. Knowledge on performing is essential for a singer to may eradicate stage fright. An equipped performer would surely be able to execute the performance audaciously.

## 3. Objectives

Analyzing the symbiosis of singing and performance in Malaysia may provide information for creative developments parallel to the rising standards of music commercially and academically without compromising traditional musical arts and culture. Sustainability is an effort in ensuring the crux of Malaysian music remain preeminent and perpetual. Documenting musical reviews and anatomies, analysis and philosophies not only define the relation of audio and visual but also design new synergies of collaborations between traditional, modern music and its influences.

### **Malaysian Traditional Music**

Symbiosis of audio visual does not only exist in modern musical performances. Traditional performances like the 'wayangkult', 'makyung' and 'bangsawan' are few to mention. Nonetheless traditional music activists are diminishing. Most prolific ones have passed bringing along their skills and knowledge for only a handful are interested to indulge in traditional music. Traditional music genres are fading swiftly. Some are not performed at all due to religious restrictions and state laws. Some traditional instruments like the 'gamelan' are not tuned to the standard A440 pitch.

Early known Malay music were acculturated or syncretic music. Classical genres like BangsawanJoget, Makyong, MelayuAsli, Zapin, Inang and Keroncong were forms of amalgamated influence through trading, cross cultures, religion and musical theatre performances from India, Persia, Arab, China and the West in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. If not preserved, these traditional heritage will no longer be around for future generations to appreciate.

The amalgamation of visual and music has always existed reaching far back to primitive period through early classical music of Malaysia. The captivating performances like 'WauBulan' and 'UlekMayang' depict the enchantment of a kite or 'wau'; and stories of myth and spiritual believes amongst villagers respectively.

Hymns and chants were composed and believed that they may transcend myths of long gone spirit or apparitions into existence. Some cultural activists in the east coast of Malaysia believe that a visitation of a princess can be sung into existence through the singing or calling chant of "UlekMayang", - a traditional ancient folk song.

The performer of a song like 'UlekMayang' must know the crux of the story in order to make the performance holistic. The singer will be able to immerse the character of the princess through her performance in line with the vocal delivery. We must know that 'UlekMayang' is a classical Malay song which originated from the state of Terengganu, Malaysia. This 'adagio' (slow time) composition, accompanied by a ritualistic dance is believed to be able to 'call' upon the spirit of a sea-princess. Derived from an ancient tale, the sea-princess was believed to have fallen in love with a fisherman and abducted his soul. It is believed that somewhere along the coast of Terengganu, 'UlekMayang' ritual dance and offerings is still being secretly practiced until today.

Only with this information and knowledge, can a performer deliver her magic on stage.

Corroborating the above is an article published 9th March 2017 by Graham Collier entitled, 'The Consciousness Question – What is The Effect of Music on the Listener?'

"Music has always played an important role in mystical rituals. The classical Greeks, for example, regarded it as an art presided by Muses, setting the mood, inciting the passion, and inducing state of mind that can take out time and even help to heal one in dire cases of tragedy or sickness." - Graham Collier.

### **Malaysian Music in the 40's and 50's**

Visual and sound evolved in Malaysia since the early era of commercial music. Evolving into the more commercial genres in the 40's and 50's, the features that were partially influenced by Indian and western music transcended into becoming apparent and conspicuous making them signature tunes of Malaysian music. Artists like AmanBelon, MomokLatiff and R. Azmi were some of the names that illuminated the Malaysian music scene then. These artistes made appearances through road-shows for fans to see them perform live. They performed with the accompaniment of a combo or an ensemble of six to eight musicians. The style and features were rhythm and combo; and the instrumentations comprise of drums, double bass, guitar, viola, trumpets, saxophones and percussions.

### **Malaysian Music in the 60's**

The sound of 60's were represented by the phenomenal music of British band "The Beatles". Their style of music stormed the world. The visual of the audience echoing the audio chants in the hooks and motives "yeah... yeah" reciprocated into the translated 'Pop Yeh-Yeh' in Malaysia. Although both music and fashion of the 60's dominated the world, the melodies, fashion of their music and outfit influenced towards Malay music still had the local flavors. These were evident in songs popularized by A. Ramlie, Jefrydin, A. Rahman Hassan and many others. Visual performances by artistes in the 60's emulated the style of Beatles. With rhythmic features, the instruments of the 60's were drums, bass guitars, rhythm guitars and lead guitars.

### **Malaysian Music in the 70's and 80's**

Malaysian artistes in 70's and early eighties were vibrant. They blossom from the seventies until the turn of the century with mild influences from Indian, Spanish and Middle East music. Artistes perform shows all over Malaysia and Singapore with their rock and pop genres.

Pop and rock music also made its mark in Malaysia in the 1970's and the 1980's. Romanticism had melancholic love songs and commercial rock genres overpowering the rhythms of the sixties. International recording labels like EMI Records Ltd and WEA Records Ltd embarked on producing Malay albums for Malaysian and Singaporean artists like SyarifahAini, Uji Rashid, Sweet Charity, Black Dog Bone, Anita Sarawak, Jamal Abdillah, Francesca Peters, Alleycats, Flybaits and many others. The features of the music then were pop, rock and ballad. The instrumentations were combo, orchestration and band. Contemporary 'Nasyid' or modern religious singing ensembles 'Al-Mizan' and 'Al-Jawaher' were not left behind. They were popular in the 70's rendering their repertoires in weddings, events in community centers and various television shows.

### **Malaysian Music in the 90's**

Music of the 90's in Malaysia was rather similar to the era of the eighties. In addition to that, the revival of traditional Malay music with modern treatment was infused and initiated by the late local composer ShuhaimiMohdZain or better known as Pak Ngah through the renditions of SitiNurhaliza, and NoranizaIdris.

Recording industry bloomed and was at its peak during this era producing many popular songs through superstars like M.Nasir, ZaitonSameon, Ramlah Ram, SitiNurhaliza and others. The 90's also brought about the mushrooming of rock bands with rock ballads composed with signature Malay melodies. The features and instrumentations of the 90's were similar to the 70's and 80's with a slight inclusion of programmed or electronic rhythms.

### **Malaysia's Millennial Music**

The millennia see the emergence of many singing heartthrobs among them like FaizalTahir, SufianSuhaimi, Hafiz Suip, KhaiBahar, WanyHasrita, Yuna, rapper Joe Flizzow and Akim and The Magistrate. Not only are there changes of trend in music but also the performances displayed by the artistes from the 50's till now. Besides the sustainability of ballad, the syncopated and rhythmic style of 'rap' along with its latest style of performance dominated the current Malaysian music scene.

## **4. Methodology**

This journal evaluates the effectiveness of delivery in singing techniques and its visual impact to listeners and viewers through establishing aspects of effective renditions. To understand these approaches, the difference between a singing voice and a message or story perceived through a captivating visual performance must be cohesively comprehended.

An article on sensation and perception supports the above statement.

"It is also possible for us to get messages that are presented below the threshold for conscious awareness—these are called subliminal messages. A stimulus reaches a physiological threshold when it is strong enough to excite sensory receptors and send nerve impulses to the brain: this is an absolute threshold. A message below that threshold is said to be subliminal: we receive it, but we are not consciously aware of it. Therefore, the message is sensed, but for whatever reason, it has not been selected for processing in working or short-term memory. Over the years there has been a great deal of speculation about the use of subliminal messages in advertising, rock music, and self-help audio programs. Research evidence (Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980; Rensink, 2004; Nelson, 2008; Radel, Sarrazin, Legrain, & Gobancé, 2009; Loersch, Durso, & Petty, 2013) shows that in laboratory settings, people can process and respond to information outside of awareness. But this does not mean that we obey these messages like zombies; in fact, hidden messages have little effect on behavior outside the laboratory."

### **Performance Portrayal through Proper Singing Methods**

Important factors in singing can be portrayed through a performance. Performance are windows to the eyes portraying what is intended by the songwriters and singer.

### **Signature Tone**

A singer with original signature tone is identifiable just by his or her voice. More often than not, these kind of singers would be sustainable. Singers with signature tones are classified as gifted. With a comfortable signature tone, a singer would be able to portray natural facial expression while singing.

A singer would visually look calm and collected on stage if breathing in singing are carried out correctly. Proper breathing techniques in singing is very important. A singer must breathe after every phrase. Registering the high notes in a song require adequate breathing.

#### **Proper Phrasing/Diction/Clarity/Articulation**

Correct phrasing and diction and articulations enables a singer to convey the clarity of message comprehensively without intermittence. Ensuring clarity in diction, articulation and dynamics determines the effectiveness of message to the listeners and viewers is delivered in the most artistic and aesthetic manner.

#### **Embellishment/Creativity of Vocal Turns/Acrobats**

These are spectacular elements that viewers want to visually believe when a singer is performing live. Inculcating creativity, embellishments and proper insertions of vocal ornaments based on a singer's natural capabilities are motivational factors for performers to prove their capabilities and audacity.

#### **Minimal Assist of Vocal Automation**

Vocal automation are unnecessary burden for singers may face intonation or pitching problems when they are performing live. Most likely a singer will sing flat or sharp when performing live on stage. Automations are shortcuts for singers who could not deliver singing renditions in perfect pitch. It is alright for producers or vocal supervisors to only use vocal automations just to beautify parts or particular words in singing lines. Overuse of automation deteriorates stage performance.

#### **Sincerity in Singing**

A singer must be sincere when performing. A sad song would not portray despair or sadness if it is performed with a smiling face. A sincere performance may be able to acquire the soft-skills of producing "goosebumps" or hair standing effect to viewers and listeners.

#### **The Understanding of Storytelling in vocalists/singers**

This supports the above point on sincerity. A singer is a storyteller who conveys the message written by the lyricist. Different style of lyrics require appropriate and relevant form of expressions. Lyric writing comes with a theme or concept like love, patriotism, 'sufism' or religious, realism and poetic. Understanding the story is utmost important. An example if this is the song "Hotel California" by 'Eagles', not many realize this song depicts the story of a haunted hotel.

#### **Dynamics/Accents/Feel**

These natural elements are only achievable if a singer is honest and sincere in singing. A singer must ensure clarity in diction, articulation and dynamics. The message has to be put across to the listeners in the most artistic and aesthetic manner.

#### **Proper Usage of "nasal" techniques for Resonance & Vibrato**

Desirable tones may be achieved through the right application of nasal resonance technique. Vibrato is the tremolo-like wave curved techniques used by many singers. These techniques if not done correctly or overdone, the performance will be deeply jeopardized.

We can hence see the significance of the above basic factors in attaining the supremacy in a performance. There are many other factors that we can look into in relation proper singing techniques. This journal shall now look into the results of interviews conducted with regards to singing and performing.

### **5. Results and Discussion**

Interviews pertaining to singing and performance were conducted between 2018 and 2019. This journal shall now present results of interviews obtained from prolific Malaysian multi-award winning superstars comprising of Dato' M.Nasir, Dato' Sri SitiNurhaliza, Dato' Jamal Abdillah, Hafiz Suip and Indonesian legend HettyKoes-Endang.

A question was posed to the prolific singers and the results were astonishing.

Question: "What are the elements needed to acquire the spectacular factor in rendition and performance?"

Dato' Jamal Abdillah – Relating to Stage Presentation

Malaysian legendary star Dato' Jamal Abdillah had this to say with regards to the above question.

"My father's words who was a religious preacher and he said... If you want the whole hall to feel what you feel, you target one person. If that person feels it until he covers his face, the rest will too." - Dato' Jamal Abdillah

The above statement shows how Dato' Jamal emphasizes on the importance of capturing the attention of audience. Having a focal point is good if a performer's mind keeps on wandering aimlessly.

Dato' Jamal also stressed the importance of outlook and comfort when performing on stage.

"...shirt needs to be comfortable, pants too short or bad mood. These are factors of nervousness that may disrupt your performance. Outfit will uplift your mood. If you're not feeling comfortable, it will affect your singing. When appearance is concerned, for example outfit, prepare the outfit to suit the occasion like (VVIP, indoor/outdoor). Adapt yourself to the situation." - Dato' Jamal Abdillah

For Dato' Jamal stage presence is conduciveness in ensuring a smooth performance. A performer's outfit must be comfortable as it will affect a performance.

Dato' Jamal also give importance to fitness and physical outlook by adding;

"Exercise for breathing. Look young. It is a naturally norm in the entertainment industry for humans to want something beautiful/nice. Need to sustain into the new era. Our physical determines breathing, voice and energy to sing" - Dato' Jamal Abdillah

"Behind the curtain stage, I would take a peek who are my audience, other participants. Preparations of this sort is necessary for us to be in control." - Dato' Jamal Abdillah

To Dato' Jamal Abdillah, the stage size and conduciveness is important for maximum utilization and familiarity. The way a singer conquers the stage show his confidence. He could be standing in just one position but if his expression is holistic then he conquers the performance.

"Amongst others, we feel nervous when we want to sing. We have to analyze the level of our nervousness... did we memorize the lyrics, is the outfit uncomfortable, pants too short or just having a bad mood? These are elements that may disrupt performance." - Dato' Jamal Abdillah

Jamal pointed out that the physical outlook of a singer not only depends on the outfit but lies also on contentment through body language.

Dato' Sri SitiNurhaliza – Relating to Stage Presentation

"Constantly look for ideas and inspiration. For example, all this while I've been watching concerts of international artistes and my seniors to find the inspiration. I also look for the limitation of my capabilities to showcase." - Dato' Sri SitiNurhaliza

This notion by prolific megastar Dato'SriSitiNurhalizareveals that intelligent singers make performances subliminal by looking into every aspects. Fresh ideas may also be injected and developed references of performances by other international performances.

"I find different concepts so that they don't get bored and would always be waiting for what is next. In my first concert, I played the percussion accompanied by colorful lightings. I challenged myself on the "flying fox" to descend from the rooftop of Stadium Putra down to the stage."

- Dato'SriSitiNurhaliza.

Siti believes that apart from singing, creative ideas are needed so that the moments in the performance would be impactful to the audience.

This is further supported by looking at the context of symbiosis of singing and performance by what is mentioned by Timothy, Craig and Bryan in “Can vei la lauzeta” (c1165) composed by Bernart de Ventadorn. The traditional music of ‘Mak Yong’ was performed by giving freedom to the performers to improvise. Profesoor Tan SooiBeng and Patricia Matusky in the book “Muzik Malaysia: TradisiKlasik, Rakyat danSinkretik” p.35 wrote:

“Melodidalamlagu-lagumakyungdipersembahkanolehseorangpenyanyiataupemainalatmuzikrebab... Variasi yang dinyanyikanataudimainkandalammelodiitubergantungkepadakepandaianandankebijaksanaanpenyanyidanpemainrebab.”

“Melody in ‘Mak Yong’ songs is performed by a singer or a rebab (lute) player... Variations sung or played in the melody relies on the creativity and intellectuality of the singer and player.” - Tan SooiBeng and Patricia Matusky

HettyKoesEndang – Relating to Stage Presentation

“Must always keep abreast... the overall look from fashion to make-up. Have to be open in accepting views so that we can progress positively; and do not be stubborn.”

“...try to look various other performances so that we can learn from the good and discard the bad.” – HettyKoesEndang

This Indonesia’s legend corroborates that besides creativity in a performance, it is important to keep abreast with the latest trend, give attention to appearance, outlook and avoid egocentrism.

Dato’ M. Nasir – Relating to Stage Presentation

M. Nasir denotes “appearance” to be associated with the artistic appearance of the singer to be as convincing as an actor on stage. A singer would not look good if there is no showmanship.

He also believes that a person has what it takes, showmanship will be carried out naturally. It must not be overdone or “over-acting”.

“Skills and mastery of technique, tone and appearance is closely related to acting performance.” - Dato’M.Nasir

Hafiz Suip – Relating to Stage Presentation

“You have to take care of yourself... health aspect... not just externally, but internally. Have to take care of external, physically too, as it is asset.” – Hafiz Suip

In supporting the statements from Hafiz Suip and Dato’ M. Nasir, we refer to Chapter 7 in a book entitled ‘The Singing Book, Dynamics of the Singing Voice, and Creating Confidence’, authored by Meribeth Bunch Dayme.

“The ability to express yourself freely on stage is the key to excellent communication with your audience. The audience knows when a performance is convincing”

“Inexperienced performers often compensate by being over the top with energy or by being too casual.”...“This amounts to cheating the audience” – Meribeth Bunch Dayme.

Dayme believed that experience and practice create balance of strengths between mind, imagination, physical and emotional required by any performer.

## 6. Discussion on Interview Outcome

From the information gathered, we can summarize the important points that a singer/performer must heed.

- A performer's outlook and stage presence requires the 'feel good', 'look good' and 'be extremely good' on stage.
- A singer's outlook is the relevance of outfit, suitability and comfort.
- On showmanship, a singer must have good posture, expression and composure.
- Stage conquering awareness involves stage size, props, band and dancers.
- Technicality and control is abiding safety requirements, lighting and monitors positions.
- Stage ethics are awareness knowing your audience like V.V.I.Ps protocol like addressing them properly, no foul language and behavior.
- It is also inappropriate to rest legs on the sound monitors when VVIPs are in front.
- Positioning of the microphone closer to the mouth while serenading softly and a few inches away from the mouth when projecting high and powerful notes would be advisable as it helps balance unnecessary unwanted noise and sound.

Parallel impact on the spectacle of audio and visual also involves analyzing level of nervousness by figuring out what are the factors that may cause nervousness and try to rectify them.

We should not forget that in synergizing singing and performance, several basic but important factors must be heeded by singers. A performer must familiarize and trust the stage. This familiarization must be executed during rehearsals. A singer should take note of the following points.

- a) Size of stage for planning of movements and dancers if necessary.
- b) Safety precautions on props, confetti and pyro flames and fireworks if there are any. The pyro-technique and fireworks effects are very dangerous. The singer or his manager must liaise with the blast master the time of explosion and radius of heat. Any blunder will be detrimental and will certainly ruin the performance.
- c) The position of cameras - Awareness of the positioning of cameras helps the performance cater for viewers at home.
- d) The position of lights so that a singer would not go out of the lighted area during a performance.
- e) The position of the band and their amplifiers – for live sound monitoring in case the monitors do not function.
- f) The position of the dancers – no unnecessary blockings.

All these preparations would be able to ensure smooth flow and precise timing and positioning of everyone on stage.

## 7. Conclusion

The writers of this journal hope that readers and singing performers would be able to benefit from the information derived. Priorities must be given to knowledge on understanding the symbiosis of proper singing and performance. Maintaining good voice; cultivating "pitch perfect" identification methods is a crucial part in a performance. The multi-disciplinary links between three basic elements comprising of vocal, musical accompaniment, performance, proper singing postures and microphone disciplines must also be nurtured, adhered and executed flawlessly. Based on the various approaches provided, the writers also hope that information from the spectacle of prolific singers would be able to help singers to strategize a remarkable performance.

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